Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/06/19 : CIA-RDP06T01849R000200100056-2

ttt
ttta030tab z
r w czczyvczc

9/1/79 Sean

tBC-DETENTEt
t(REVIEW)t
tBy BERNARD GWERTZMANt
tc. 1979 N.Y. Times News Servicet

WASHINGTON - The United States and the Soviet Union demonstrated again last week the uncanny ability of superpowers to elevate irritating episodes into public dramas. First, there was the excitement over whether or not a Bolshoi ballerina really wanted to return to Moscow. No sooner was that three-day affair seemingly settled than a new and possibly more serious issue arose. The presence of a 2,000 to 3,000-man Soviet combat force in Cuba was disclosed. Why was it there? Nobody in Washington had a clear reason.

In historical terms, the two developments may end up as minor footnotes underscoring the difficulties of arranging Soviet- American relations smoothly. Yet, despite strains and frustrations, high-level relations seemed affable. A visiting group of American senators received assurances in Moscow that Soviet intentions were benign, and Prime Minister Aleksei N. Kosygin was particularly accommodating in accepting limits on Soviet weapons in the SALT II treaty and in the negotiations to follow.

However, the ballerina incident and the presence of the Soviet troops in Cuba both reflected the rather striking lack of trust between Moscow and Washington, despite years of rather intense relations, including the detente period, from 1972 to 1975.

Whether Lyudmila Vlasova, the ballerina, genuinely wished to return to Moscow or whether she preferred to stay in the United States with her husband, the Bolshoi star, Aleksandr Godunov, should have been cleared up promptly by minor functionaries. Instead, for three days, her Aeroflot plane was blocked by New York police, and President Carter and Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, became personally involved before Miss Vlasova, and her Soviet security escorts, were allowed to depart.

American officials, fearful of being accused of allowing her to be ''spirited'' off to Moscow, claimed a ''victory'' for the human rights principle of non-forced expatriation. The Russians, embarrassed that Godunov had become the first Bolshoi dancer to jump a foreign tour, refused to let Miss Vlasova off the plane, apparently uncertain that she could be trusted to go home. Neither Americans nor Russians trusted the other side. Neither side could afford to be perceived as giving in to the other.

The presence of Soviet troops in Cuba underscores another [illegible] of continuing Moscow-Washington competitiveness. As [illegible] Brzezinski, the White House national security adviser, [illegible] ''cooperative'' and ''[illegible]''

The Soviet combat force, if [illegible] description, was sent to Cuba [illegible] without regard for American public opinion or political sensitivities. For the Carter administration, faced with the problem of having to justify the SALT treaty, the Cuban situation presented a dilemma. Was the small combat force worth creating a major incident over, and if a clash with Moscow was avoided, could one with Congress also be skirted? Or was a facedown necessary to get SALT ratified?

Sen. Richard Stone, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee and Democrat from Florida where his constituents include hundreds of thousands of Cuban exiles, said the administration was too timid in dealing with the Russians and that he would not be satisified until the last Russian soldier had left Cuba. He said Cuba now had become part of the SALT debate, whether the administration liked it or not.

The chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Frank Church, D-Iowa, denounced the Soviet presence from his home in Boise, where he is campaigning for re-election. Sen. Robert Dole, R-Kans., who is a presidential candidate, and Sen. Harry F. Byrd Jr., I-Va., called for suspending the SALT debate. But Sen. Robert C. Byrd, the Majority Leader, tried to calm emotions. He said that since the SALT treaty still had not cleared committee, there would be time enough for the aninistration to clarify the Cuban situation without linking it now to the debate on ratifying the SALT treaty.

For the moment, the administration refused to be pushed into tension of the magnitude of a ''Cuban Missile Crisis.'' The State Department limited itself to expressing concern, obviously hoping that Moscow would do something to calm things. A Soviet naval task force steaming toward Cuba had turned around earlier in the summer, perhaps to avoid becoming enmeshed in the SALT debate. The hope was that Moscow could show equal adroitness about the forces in Cuba.

While Soviet and American diplomats were busily trying to contain these disputes, Vice President Mondale was receiving a warm reception in China. The difference in tone between America's relations with Russia and China was striking.

For the moment, the Chinese have chosen to roll over like a cuddly panda bear in dealing with the Americans. Seeking to enlist Washington in an alliance against the other bear, the Chinese seem willing to go far to accumulate American good will.

Washington has stressed, as Mondale repeated in Peking last week, that it does not want to tilt toward the Chinese side to the point where the Soviet Union, feeling its national interests are threatened, may lose interest in keeping East-West competition within reasonably nonbelligerent limits.

NY-0901 1456edt

Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/06/19 : CIA-RDP06T01849R000200100056-2